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AUTHOR McGinty, Suzanne
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ABSTRACT

A reflective discussion is presented on the process of becoming an ethical researcher. Interest in the question stems from personal biography. The framework of ethical concerns of L. G. Roman and M. W. Apple (1990) is used to discuss seven issues that researchers commonly face: (1) the writing of a "true" account; (2) the usefulness of the research; (3) the relationship of the researcher and the researched; (4) modesty; (5) demystification; (6) the imposition of theory; and (7) reciprocity. Central to the discussion is the question of the relationship of the researcher and the researched. The materialist feminist paradigm, as exemplified by Roman (1988), places the relationship of the researcher and the researched right at the center of inquiry. Reality is not seen as something that exists apart from its context. The epistemological nature of reality is illusive, captured by the researcher and the researched in a moment of relationship. There is a 22-item list of references. (SLD)

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ETHICAL ISSUES IN CONSTRUCTING THE RESEARCHER SELF:

A FEMINIST INFLUENCED DEBATE

By

SUZANNE McGINTY
University of Illinois
210 Education
1310 South Sixth Street
Champaign, IL 61820
USA

Ph: (217) 337-1249 (h)
Ph: (217) 333-8529 (w)
E-Mail: <scmg1903@uxa.cso.uiuc.edu>

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Abstract

This paper presents a reflective discussion on the process of becoming an ethical researcher. Interest in the questions stems from personal biography. Roman and Apple's (1990) framework of ethical concerns is used to discuss seven issues that researchers commonly face: the writing of a "true" account; the usefulness of the research; the relationship of the researcher and the researched; modesty; demystification; the imposition of theory; and reciprocity. Central to the discussion is the question of the relationship of the researcher and the researched.

ETHICAL ISSUES IN CONSTRUCTING THE RESEARCHER SELF:

A FEMINIST INFLUENCED DEBATE

> The determination of how actions come to be regarded as moral, that is, consistent with particular standards of right and wrong in pursuing the goods of human life, requires more than an opinion of how well an act conforms, on its face, to the pertinent rule of conduct . . . an act, in order to count as moral, requires a positioning of the self--not only as the actor but as the subject of her own moral inquiry. (Alston, 1989, p. 7)

Nowhere is this more true than in the researcher role. I have a strong distrust of researchers stemming from my days of being a victim, one of the researched. I lived in a remote part of Australia where researchers would come regularly, at least in the cooler season, and pick my brain and those of a few of the Aborigines I lived with, disappear into the sky and never be heard of again. Occasionally I would hear that so and so had published a piece of work which purported to give some insight into the lives of Aborigines.

I abhorred this sort of research. I resented the fact that a researcher could speak about other people's lives without checking that what they'd written was "true." I resented that they would come into the field, take up hours of my time without ever giving anything back to me, and I resented the fact that what they wrote became enshrined mythology in academic circles. I think I even resented the fact that they wrote about things that I thought they knew very little about.

I wondered, too, why the voices of the Aborigines were not recorded for their own worth, their world views allowed to stand on their own, and why those researchers never came back to visit those who had given them a livelihood. Later, as I read about research methods, I came to realize that my frustration

was well founded. The principles these researchers were acting upon actually had names like, "the rape model of research" as Reinharz (1979) describes it.

During my graduate course work I spent one year in a local high school learning about the researcher "I" (Peshkin, 1992). The purpose was to learn something about who I was as a researcher, what sort of researcher I wanted to be, and to read about other researchers and their ethical dilemmas and decisions. Here was a new part of me to be experienced and developed.

> . . . the self is not one more "thing" among things to be known but is the location of the myriad relations and choices in which one is engaged. There are no experiences which can reveal our true identities since there is no true self waiting for discovery or demystification. (Alston, 1989, p. 15)

The task was enhanced by the weekly group sessions where my advisor and three other students would gather and discuss our emerging researcher selves. Smith (1990b) suggests that making ethical reasoning conscious and explicit is a means for improving ethical reasoning. This underscores the value of the weekly discussion groups of which I was a part. Brody (quoted in Smith, 1990b), lists five processes for ethical decision making: having a perception that a moral problem exists; listing alternative actions that might be taken; making a choice among those alternatives; determining the consequences of that choice; and, comparing each of the consequences with one's own set of values using the criteria, "Could I live with this?" Smith (1990b) adds another process that he considers valuable: dialogue with others. Sharing one's judgement points enables one to be challenged to list all the alternatives, make informed choices, and, as fully as possible, understand the consequences.

> *Ethics* refers to that complex of ideals showing how individuals should relate to one another in particular situations, to principles of conduct guiding those relationships, and to the kind of reasoning one engages in when thinking about such ideals and principles. (Smith, 1990a, p. 141)

The Material Feminist Paradigm

It was within the material feminist research paradigm that I found most discussion on the relationship of the researcher and the researched. Material feminism sees inquiry as a political act. The nature of reality is interpreted through a set of values which places the concept of gender at the heart of inquiry (Lather, 1986). Others like Balsamo (1988), Kramarae & Treichler (1985), and McRobbie (1982) make a connection between the socially-constructed category of gender and the lived experiences of persons in gender, class and race categories. The relationship between the researcher and the researched is one of cooperation toward the goal of transformative praxis. That means that false consciousness is eliminated as both the researcher and the researched come to understand the world from the values that mediated the inquiry. Within this paradigm comprehending feminine subordination is the goal in eliminating false consciousness. Materialism makes a commitment to transformative praxis.

Given this very brief outline of the material feminist paradigm, I will take Roman & Apple (1990) as an exemplar of material feminism because they clearly spell out what they regard as ethical practice in relation to an actual research project. I want to see whether my ideal ethical self is satisfied with their criteria. I also want to expand their notion of "gender oppression" to include other oppressions of class, race and sexual preference.

Roman's (1988) research with female punk slam dancers led her to believe that there are several criteria by which one can gauge the goodness of one's research in an ethical sense (Roman & Apple, 1990). The seven are essential but not exhaustive. She asks:

1. Does the ethnography/written report resonate with the actual lived experiences of those studied?

2. Is it useful to the "subjects", enabling them to comprehend feminine (or other) subordination?

3. Does the methodology of meeting in groups lessen the divide between the researcher and the researched?

4. Are the theoretical understandings and concepts accessible to those studied, or are they so abstract and abstruse as to confuse those studied?

5. Does the written account demystify or clarify the underlying structural power relations that shape their everyday experiences?

6. Does the theory of the researched modify the researcher's theory and interpretations?

7. Have I, as a researcher, been an "intellectual tourist" or "voyeur", taking from the community without giving back to them?

(Roman & Apple, 1990).

Each of these criteria of "goodness" brings with them a debate about the underlying ethical principles which confront all researchers. According to House (1990) these are, the principle of mutual respect: that you would not do to anyone else what you would not want done to yourself; the elimination of coercion and manipulation; and a certain reciprocity of benefit. Roman & Apple's (1990)

criteria for judging "goodness" seem to fall within these three principles, although they call it "theoretical and political adequacy." I will take each of the seven criteria for further discussion.

Writing a "true" account

The first criterion, which requires that the interpretive account resonate with the experience of the research subjects' lives, would seem to demand that the researched read/or have read to them, the contents of the report/thesis, and approve it. Approve it in the sense that it "fits" their lives. Roman's criteria would suggest that if the researched did not agree with the interpretation given by the researcher, the researcher would have failed to have captured the essence of their thought and actions.

What if the respondents "understand" the researcher's account, and that forces them to face a reality that is disappointing, terribly sad, or miserable. The researcher has completed her report and by giving it to the respondents to approve it, she secures her "moral integrity" as a researcher. But what about the person who now has to live with the sad reality that the researcher has revealed to them? Does the researcher's responsibility confine itself to securing the "approval" of the respondent? From my reading of the nature of transformative praxis within feminist research, the researcher is morally bound to support the researched in ways that would help the respondents cope with the new knowledge.

The classic case of unethical behavior, according to the material feminist paradigm, is the now infamous book Let Us Now Praise Famous Men. Journalists Agee and Evans (1941) spend the summer with a sharecropper family in

Alabama. They published a moving story with photographs of extreme poverty in the hopes that the government would do something about it. There was no permission by the family involved to publish and, in fact, the researchers took photos when the family was out of the house. It would seem that the family they lived with were unaware of their researcher role. It was many years before the family heard about what had happened. They later recounted how they felt betrayed (Smith, 1990a).

Peshkin (1986)--a Jew--sent his book God's Choice back to the fundamentalist Christian school for approval. They gave it, accepting his last chapter (the critique) as his own views. This was the result of a long period in the field during which time he had time to build up trusting relationships with those he studied. The conflict within this criteria arises when the researcher wants to interpret or publish the data in a way that the group researched does not want.

The lack of openness of purpose is a problem for all researchers. If you tell the respondents what it is you are researching, there is a belief that this will influence the data you will receive. This belief stems from the ontological view that there is a reality "out there" to be described. Because feminists believe that reality is critically constructed by both the researcher and the researched, deception or non-disclosure of purpose is not an issue because the researcher and the researched are both involved in the construction of reality. The distortion of that reality by deception is something to be avoided, something that should not occur.

Lincoln (1990), a constructivist, suggests that a researcher should "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This categorical imperative demands that the researcher not lie or deceive the researched in any way. This makes sense when the epistemology underlying the constructivist paradigm indicates a free flow of information between the researcher and the researched. However, it could be problematic if you want to study, say, the construction of identity of first generation immigrants in a large high school. Announcing your purpose at the beginning could have the respondents tailoring their interviews and interaction to those ends. This would not enable the researcher to observe for him/herself what that construction might be. If the subjects are not informed as to the purpose of the research, is that deception? It seems that if a researcher were working in a large setting like a high school where hundreds of people are involved, the decisions for or against disclosure to each and every one would be different from working in a smaller setting like a family or group of punk slam dancers. Those most closely involved in the research should be informed as to its intent and process

Usefulness

The second criterion, "is it useful to the researched, enabling them to comprehend feminine subordination," is problematic. (Remember, the word feminine should be include race, class, or sexual preference). This criterion presumes that one is "studying down." This means that one has, as research respondents, persons of a subordinated class, race, or gender. Does it equally apply to "studying up?" That is, for example, studying those of a higher social status, or acknowledged feminists who understand feminine subordination, or

those in a minority group who are well aware of racism. One could query what value it is to "enlighten" others about their ignorance of subordination. Why would you do this? Does it lead to greater happiness or greater misery? I think back to those researchers who studied the Aborigines and ask whether their studies produced greater happiness for those people, or were they irrelevant to them? Should greater goodness--as defined by the researched--be the moral outcome of research? One would hope that one's research would not make people any more miserable--less good--than they already are. The researcher always has a thesis, book, or article as their relevant outcome: something which makes them happier. But the researched are often not considered as having any moral right to benefits other than nebulous future benefits which may flow from a change in government policy for example; benefits which are determined as benefits by others, not necessarily by the respondents.

Understanding oppression is meant to lead on to an intervention or change either in the personal, professional, or public sphere. Roman & Apple (1990) do not state whether they, being the enlighteners, have the responsibility to be the change agent, whether the subjects are meant to do that for themselves, or whether enlightenment is change itself. Roman (1988) does say that the the written account should demystify or clarify the underlying structural power relations that shape the everyday lives of the young women she studied. Is understanding the account the enlightenment? Does enlightenment have to include some action which would change the life of the respondents for the better?

> The overt ideological goal of feminist research in the human sciences is to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position. (Lather, 1986, p. 6)

I presume by "correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience" Lather means correct for all parties involved, the respondents, the researcher, and the readers of the research. The feminist position is clear. Gender is at the heart of the researcher's values. However, this emphasis on ideological goals veils a need that I believe is more important, and that is the usefulness of the research to both parties. I will discuss this further in the section on reciprocity.

The relationship of the researcher to the researched

The dialectical relationship of the researched and the researcher is the issue of the third criterion. Some feminists reject this dichotomy (Cook & Fonow, 1986) as the imposition of the masculine modus operandi. If one's epistemology is of the positivist paradigm then one would work to eliminate influence between the researcher and the researched in order to minimize data distortion. The critical realist, as exemplified by the material feminist, works subjectively to maximize the relationship of the researcher and the researched because it is that relationship which will determine what data is collected and to a certain extent, the trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln, 1990).

Oakley (1981) studied the relationship of the socio-economic background of women and their decision to have, or not have, and abortion. She found many women she interviewed wanted to ask her questions, to get information from her about pregnancy. She, as researcher, was not the only one asking questions. The opportunity to ask questions back to the researcher by the respondents destroys

the traditional expectation of the researcher as non-involved. It is a way of establishing rapport, of seeing the researched as part of the process, and the researcher as giving answers and not just seeking them. Actively seeking this form of involvement is important for three reasons: it increases the reliability and validity of the information given (trustworthiness); it does not subordinate women to being just information givers, typified by the term "rape research" (Reinharz, 1979); and lastly, it discounts the objective positivistic paradigm as the only way to obtain "truth."

Roman used group meetings to overcome some of the barriers between her, a white university researcher, and the young punk women, of various races, who were still at school. She held small group meetings and discussions, encouraging them to give her feedback on unwarranted interpretations or incorrect information that she may have gathered. Triangulation, the art of checking data from multiple sources, seems to be at work here.

> Sequential interviews conducted in an interactive, dialogic manner that entails self-disclosure on the part of the researcher foster a sense of collaboration. In the name of data gathering, group interviews provide tremendous potential for deeper probing and reciprocally educative encounter. (Lather, 1986, p. 15)

Researcher as fan. Penley (1990), advocates the researcher as "fan." For her, becoming a slash video fan--groups of women who for a hobby make pornographic movies by cutting existing film and inserting pornographic scenes, e.g. Star Trek videos are cut to make Spock and Kirk lovers.--made it easier to gain inside information and be accepted by the group. This subjectivity is seen as a virtue by many feminists who reject the notion that subjectivity is a dirty

word in research. However, had Peshkin become a fundamentalist Christian in order to write God's Choice, he would have been denying his very roots as a Jew. He believes that one does not have to become a fan in order to do good qualitative research. His belief was strengthened when the Christian school accepted his book as a good representation of their lives. He did not become a Christian, nor was he a fan of Fundamental Christianity.

Being a fan does give one particular inside information that may be difficult to get if one remains an outsider. But it also brings with it the biases of the group. Also, if there are factions within the group, one could not be a fan of all of them. Sometimes it is easier for the researcher to remain outside the group as a non-fan so that different factions can be equally seen and studied if this is important to the study. If, on the other hand, one is trying to construct a reality with the respondents, then one would have to work very hard at coming to some consensus between oneself and the researched.

Researcher as friend. The nature of the relationship of the researcher and the researched could be explored as one of friendship. Alston (1989) applies her notion of "friend" to the student-teacher relationship. I extend it to the researcher-researched relationship. She argues that the current dislike for the notion of teacher-as-friend stems from our modern ideas of friendship. Modern friendship is seen as a private matter, one which has obligations of loyalty and a certain amount of equality which implies a one-for-one reciprocity. There is a certain amount of feeling and personal reward for friendship.

Alston says, in contrast to the modern view of friendship, there is the classical model as typified in the writings of Aristotle. "To be a friend is to place

oneself in relation to what is good" (Alston, 1990, p. 10). Affection and activity are what are engaged in in order to sustain the friendship. They are not goals in themselves. The emphasis is on what is good for the other, while there are mutual benefits of the affection and activity. This seems similar to Noddings (1984) ethical notion of caring, although the similarities cannot be taken too far.

What are the implications of the notion of friendship for the relationship of the researcher to the researched? It is not difficult to see why the modern notion does not fit many researcher/researched relationships. Privatizing the relationship may or may not suit the research situation. Loyalty is praised, but equality is something that is problematic because of the way many research designs are set up. In most research situations there is an inherent power differential between the researcher and the researched. The researcher is often seen as powerful, and the researched as powerless. However, if the researcher adopts a stance of genuine learner, then this differential should be reversed. The researched are in a very powerful position to withhold or give information thus making them powerful.

The classical notion of friendship may have more to offer in conceptualizing the relationship of the researcher to the researched than the modern concept of friendship. Partners-in-friendship intensifies the constructivist and feminist proposal for the ethical relationship of the researcher and researched. Affection and activity in the public realm, as the research situation often is, does away with the modern notion of privacy. It bring the relationship into the open. And the pluralist public realm in which we live does away with any common notion of

"good" from the classical sense. The relationship is one of mutual benefit. I believe that this compromise brings possibilities because it does not emphasize the power relations that exist between the researcher and the researched, rather, it emphasizes the mutual benefits each derives from the relationship.

Researcher as lover. Another way of conceptualizing the relationship of the researcher and the researched is that proposed by Reinharz (1979) as lover, and a similar notion of Alston's, eros, which she uses to encapsulate the student-teacher relationship. Lovers create a mutual world (Reinharz, 1979). The construction of reality is in the production of the relationship of the researcher and the researched.

> The argument for love as an orientation for teachers gains its strength from the connection of love to the conditions and products of its generative capacity. (Alston, 1989, p. 13)

In the Socratic dialogues the point of *aporia* or the point where the learner is able to say "I don't know," is the beginning of real dialogue for Socrates. The point of *aporia* for the researcher is the reason why he/she embarks on a research project. The transformative praxis advocated by the material feminists is another point of *aporia* for the researched. The recognition of the necessity of both the researcher and the researched for one another is an important part of the relationship. The interconnection of the social relationships, for the purpose of the research, is the heart of the lover model.

A certain amount of modesty

> Are the theoretical understandings and concepts accessible, that is, written in language that is neither pretentious nor condescending? (Roman, 1988, p. 63)

If I am committed to the researched reading and understanding what has been written about them, language that is meant only for the academy is out of place. It has to be understood by those reading/creating the script. An ethical question arises when those doing research say in their reports that this research has benefits for society in such and such a way, and yet those conclusions are not confirmed or even known by those researched. Most PhD candidates are required to show that their research is of benefit to the profession/society. This is usually done by quoting other literature which says that this research needs to be done, rather than having those to whom the benefits should flow, confirm the need or the conclusions. Ethical questions arise when university departments require such obscure language in a report or thesis that it is unintelligible to the participating respondents. Is the university promoting an aura of mystique or of deliberate removal of the information gathered from the respondents? One day the respondents may demand disclosure and demystifying of written reports as a regular part of the contract between the researcher and the respondents. To date this is left to the researcher to act as they see morally responsible. It has not been adequately addressed in the literature. There is a problem of the respondents and the researcher having the same language/meaning system. Roman would say that the researcher has a responsibility to write for the language and meanings of the respondents. However, this could prove problematic when when the respondents are six years old, for example. Obviously, consideration has to be given to reporting the results to informants in the most appropriate way.

Demystification

Roman has coined the term "intellectual tourist" for those who work hard at becoming immersed in the field while there; but whose written research is of no use to the researched because it is too difficult for them to understand. The intellectual tourist is the classic mystifier. The question of whether demystification brings about transformative praxis has not been answered. It seems, from my experience, that the process of demystification is not something that one only does when the report or thesis is finished. One has a responsibility to keep the respondents informed as the project progresses. The extent of this would be determined by both the researcher and the respondents. Unless the respondents are particularly knowledgeable about research practices, and this is rarely the case, the need to explain the research process is an important part of establishing and maintaining trust. The construction of a shared perception of reality would imply that the search (and re-search) is a joint venture.

The imposition of theory

The "voyeur," a term coined by Roman, is one who does not disclose, or minimally discloses, his a priori theory that he uses to describe, view, interpret, and frame questions in the process of writing up the report. The very idea that those researched might have reasons for acting the way they do, even a theory or two, has been foreign to a lot of researchers. The imposition of theories onto research situations has been questioned by many researchers. The rapport established in the field is short lived as the researcher sees himself there to gather information only.

Some researchers are trained to say "I don't know" when they are asked a question about which they may know something but don't wish to disclose. Roman

rejects this response as inappropriate for a researcher who values reciprocal sharing and caring. She believes that the researched should have the right, power, and authority to challenge a theoretical interpretation about their lives. One problem with this stance is that if the interpretations differ, whose interpretation is accepted? Should they both be included? This challenge comes from the roots of the meaning of the word "subject:" generally a term meaning one subjected to a ruler, or laws, or one subjected to a range of historical impositions which have created a set of social forces that impinge on the life of the subject. The rejection of the term "subject" also means a rejection of the implications of subjugation. Theoretical interpretation should be explained and discussed with the researched.

Reciprocity

The important question of who really benefits from research has annoyed researchers for a long time. Jorgensen (1989) relates that in the field there will be some persons with whom one forms close relationships, but for the most part there will be a range of acquaintances from those we barely know to those with whom we become friends. The form of reciprocity that most researchers agree on is that there will be a mutual agreement that the research is interesting to the researched and that they agree to being part of it.

Jorgensen (1989) believes that the careful participant observer is always on the look out for ways to reciprocate the respondent. Money is the least favorable way. Small favors, praise, and compliments are beneficial in forming relationships, but respect for one another is highly valued symbolic action. The creation of friendships are rare, but can happen, as it did in the Adler's case

(cited in Jorgensen, 1989). He says that these researchers, went beyond the call of duty and helped one of their informants, a drug dealer, find a lawyer when he was caught. Many researchers would disagree with Jorgensen's statement that friendships are rare. Oakley (1981) established many friends in the course of her work with pregnant women, even to the extent of attending many of the births with them. She does not claim that this "was beyond the call of duty" but a natural extension of her researcher role. Peshkin (personal communication, 10/10/90) claims that reciprocity can take many forms, one of which is the opportunity for the respondent to reflect on their work with someone who is very interested in what they are doing.

The practical imperative of, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," according to Lincoln (1990), puts an end to what Reinharz (1979) has called the "rape model" of research. This is the model where the researchers take what they need from the researched and give nothing in return "leaving respondents defenseless, vulnerable, and perhaps wounded" (Lincoln, 1990, p. 293). Both material feminists and constructivists would abhor this sort of research. Lincoln believes that it is not necessary to <u>use</u> others.

> We can engage them, and invite them to engage us, in determining what needs to be researched, why, and how we should go about that. (Lincoln, 1990, p. 293)

This of course takes away some of the initiative for topic selection from the researcher and this is problematic for those who have dedicated their lives to researching a particular issue. Should funding agencies give grants to those who pursue topics of their own making? Or should they, as the constructivists would

want it, only fund those proposals that come from the field? This ethical dilemma will be answered according to one's own ethical values.

Australian Aboriginal organizations are now demanding that they have the power over what research on Aborigines gets funded by the federal and state governments. It is no longer ethical, they say, that a researcher proposes a research topic without it first having their approval, or better still, is initiated by them (Yavu Kama, 1989). So whether researchers agree or disagree with this principle the decision may be out of their hands, forced upon them by groups who have many times been the victims of "rape research."

The principle of "dialogue" suggests that the researcher and researched negotiate the research process from the beginning to the end. This is consistent with the constructivist and the material feminist paradigm. The dialogue would also include discussions as to whether the respondents want to remain anonymous or not in the publication. Some times a researcher may know, better than the researched, the full implications of being named, in which case this knowledge should be shared with the respondents. At other times the researcher may know that there will be no ill effects from the results even when the participants are named, but the participants want to remain anonymous. A mutual agreement has to be worked out in this situation, with the respondent having the last say.

Conclusion

This paper presented a reflective discussion on the process of becoming an ethical researcher. Ethical practice has implications for the knowledge produced. "What you see depends on how you look" (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982, p.23). "*How* you look" implies the means/method, and "how *you* look" implies subjectivity.

Roman and Apple's (1990) framework is used to discuss seven ethical issues that researchers commonly face: the writing of a "true" account; the usefulness of the research; the relationship of the researcher and the researched; modesty; demystification; the imposition of theory; and reciprocity.

The materialist feminist paradigm, as exemplified by Roman (1988), places the relationship of the researcher and the researched right at the center of inquiry. She believes that reality is not something that exists apart from its context. The epistemological nature of reality is illusive, a slice of life, captured by the researcher and the researched in a moment of relationship. This relationship is explored as fan, friend and lover.

I have realized that actions speak louder than words and they tell you a lot about your ethics as a researcher. I do not want to become a researcher like those who visited me. I want the chance to construct myself as a researcher, and from a knowledge of the different paradigms, determine what is ethical behavior for me.

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